

Morning and Evening Prayer Rules in the Russian Orthodox Tradition

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Abbreviations

ANF—*The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translation of the Writings and the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. Ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973.

NPNF— *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. Ed. Alexander Roberts, et al. 14 vols. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.

SB— *Service Book. The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*. Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1999.

Introduction

My interest in the history of the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules came from a somewhat unusual source: in more than seven years of serving as a parish priest, I have regularly heard it confessed by a large number of people that they fail to complete all of their daily prayers. What is meant by these confessions is that some penitents regularly cut short the Rules contained in the Orthodox Prayer Book. It must be noted, however, that there appear to be no standard rubrics for the composition or length of Morning and Evening Rules, nor is there a mention of the “sin of the shortening of the Prayer Rule” either in the daily confession of sins contained at the end of evening prayers, or in the Rite of Confession contained in the *Book of Needs*. To be sure, one of the prayers in the evening rule does mention being “neglectful of prayer,” but this likely refers to one’s general attitude toward prayer, rather than to a modification of the Prayer Rule, although there can certainly exist a causal relationship between the two. At least two issues immediately arise from this situation: 1) whether shortening the generally prescribed Prayer Rule should be viewed as a confessional issue; and 2) by whom and when the Prayer Rules were compiled.

Finally, I must note that this project is intended to be a stepping stone for further and more detailed inquiry. Due to the limitations of this project, the multiplicity of various traditions of Prayer Rules existing within different Local Orthodox Churches will remain largely outside the scope of this study. Instead, the focus will be placed on the Russian tradition and its modern application.

Composition of Modern Russian Prayer Rules

Modern Russian Orthodox Rules of Morning and Evening Prayers according to the *Prayer Book* published in 2003 by the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, N.Y. are composed of the “beginning prayers,” the “main group of prayers,” and the “ending prayers.” Each one of these groups will be discussed in further detail in this section.

The “Main Groups”

The “main groups” contain ten numbered morning prayers and ten evening prayers, also numbered. The *Jordanville Prayer Book* (1999) is usually thought of as the standard for Russian Orthodox Christians in the United States, but many prayer books published in Russia contain eleven numbered evening prayers—a prayer attributed to Saint Peter the Studite (Peter of Atroa [773-837]) is added after the eighth prayer (*Complete Prayer Book* [2000] and *Prayer Book of a Woman* [2007], among many others). This, however, appears to be a very recent addition, as at least one reprint edition of a nineteenth-century Russian prayer rule mirrors the current Jordanville format (*Monastic Cell Rule* [1977]). To complicate this matter further, the 1955 edition of the *Jordanville Prayer Book* contains the same prayers in the morning “main group,” but lacks one of the prayers attributed to Saint Macarius the Great (number four in current usage), and also prayers six and eight in the evening group. Thus, although the main morning prayers appear to have remained the same throughout the twentieth century, the evening prayer rule shows a small degree of instability.

Many of the prayers that comprise the “main groups” in the Evening and Morning Rules are attributed to Church Fathers. In the current Jordanville edition of the *Prayer Book*, four morning prayers and two evening prayers are directly attributed to Saint Macarius the Great (of Egypt) (ca. 300-391), two morning prayers are attributed to Saint Basil the Great (of Caesarea) (330-379), one evening prayer is attributed to Saint John Chrysostom (347-407), and one to Saint Antiochus. It is not clear which Antiochus is thought to be the author of the prayer—the one who lived in the seventh century at the monastery founded by Saint Sabbas the Sanctified (439-532) in Palestine, or the one who lived in Syria in the fifth century. The remaining prayers in the “main groups” do not have direct attributions.

It is unclear whether Saint Macarius or Saint Antiochus in fact composed the prayers that we now find in the *Russian Prayer Book*, but the attributions may in fact be genuine, as the large number of prayers without any attributions seems to indicate the lack of any effort to create faux attributions. In any case, the spiritual height and theological depth of the prayers most likely point to the prayers’ saintly origins.

The “main group” of morning prayers in the *Jordanville Prayer Book* consists of five prayers to the Father (1, 3-6), two to the Lord Jesus Christ (2, 8), two to the Theotokos (7, 10), and one to the Guardian Angel (9). The “main group” of the evening rule consists of two prayers to the Father (1,5), three prayers to Christ (2, 4, 8), one to the Holy Spirit (3), one to the Theotokos (9), and one to the Guardian Angel (10). Prayers six and seven of the evening rule are difficult to categorize, as they may be understood as directed either to the Father or to the Son.

The “Beginning Prayers”

The “beginning prayers” or the section preceding the first prayer of the “main group” seem to be uniform across the various examined editions of the *Russian Prayer Book*. First, two prayers while still coming to one’s senses after sleep: “In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” Then, the so-called “common beginning”: the opening blessing,[\[1\]](#) followed by “Glory... both now...,” “O, Heavenly King...,” the Trisagion, “Glory... both now...,” “O Most Holy

Trinity...,” and “Our Father...” This set of prayers is standard at the beginning of such public church services as the Vespers, Matins, or Hours, for example, which places the Morning and Evening Rules in that context from the very beginning.

What follows offers additional clues into the liturgical (related to common worship) origins of the Prayer Rules. The “common beginning” of the morning rule is followed by the beginning troparia,^[2] prayer to the Most Holy Trinity, Psalm 51 (Greek numbering: Psalm 50), and the Creed—the very format which makes the beginning of the Midnight Office. Thus, the beginning of the daily Morning Prayer Rule is the beginning of the Midnight Office.

Likewise, in the evening prayer rule, the “common beginning” is followed by troparia from the Small Compline, which are then followed by the “main group” of evening prayers. In other words, it may be proposed (and such proposals have indeed been made) that the Morning and Evening Rules of Prayer in the Russian tradition are the “domesticated” versions or substitutes of the Midnight Office and Small Compline. A further proposal can then be made that the development of the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules may have been affected by the gradual disappearance of the Midnight Office and the Small Compline from parish life. Indeed, it is no longer common to find these services served outside of monastery churches. Thus it is possible that they became somewhat domesticated and gave shape to the Morning and Evening Rules.

The “Ending Prayers”

The “ending prayers” of the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules offer further evidence of their liturgical roots. In the Morning Rule, the invocation of the patron saint and the Angelic Salutation to the Most Holy Theotokos (“O Theotokos and Virgin rejoice...”) is followed by commemorations of the living and the departed—a pattern which can also be found in the Midnight Office—and a liturgical dismissal.

The evening rule also contains a liturgical-style dismissal: a Kontakion^[3] to the Theotokos is followed by three short prayers to the same, a short prayer to the Trinity, the *Axion Estin* (a millennium-old hymn to the Theotokos), and a formal dismissal. What follows the dismissal, however, allows us a glimpse into the second nature of the Prayer Rules—the private monastic prayer.

This second, non-liturgical nature of the Prayer Rules is also evident in the “main group” of Morning and Evening Prayers, but it is most obvious in the somewhat elaborate ritual of actually getting into bed: a beautiful prayer of Saint John Damascene is recited “while pointing at thy bed,” then another prayer is said while kissing one’s pectoral cross, then prayers asking forgiveness for oneself and others, the Daily Confession of Sins, and finally, a prayer “when giving thyself up to sleep”: “Into Thy hands, O Lord Jesus Christ my God, I commit my spirit. Do Thou bless me, do Thou have mercy on me, and grant me life eternal. Amen.” Clearly, prayers and rituals like these are not liturgical, and neither are the main morning and evening prayers. In fact the prayers contained in the “main groups” of the rules are not found in any services of the liturgical cycle, with only the notable exception of the morning prayers five and six, which apparently come from the Midnight Office.

In light of these observations, it may be hypothesized that the Morning and Evening Rules as they presently exist within Russian Orthodoxy are a confluence of two traditions—the liturgical tradition of the Church and the private non-liturgical monastic tradition. Furthermore, since the liturgical tradition was also developed in monasteries, and more specifically, in the monasteries in and around Jerusalem,[4] the fusion of the liturgical and private traditions into the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules may have had its origins within monasteries, and eventually spread among the laity.

Finally, while a certain form of the Prayer Rules has achieved a normative status among the faithful, the rules themselves seem to be a product of spiritual creativity, capable of changing within a chosen format. Just as it is not uncommon for some people to shorten their Rules, others add various prayers, readings, and other components—whether by individual inspiration or with the advice of their confessor.

Earliest Mentions of Christian Private Prayer

That Christians have prayed at home at regular times from the very beginnings of Christianity is well documented, although it is nearly impossible to know what prayers, if any, could be considered normative or standard for the early Christians. It is likely that forms of private prayer evolved along the same patterns as the Church’s liturgical tradition—from Judean models that received Christian meaning, to a period of specifically Christian creativity, and to selection and codification.

Of course, it must be noted that not everything in private prayer can or should be codified. Prayer, being an integral part of human spirituality, probably exists in its highest form as a free and unrestricted communion with the Creator. Saint Clement of Alexandria (*ca.* 150-215), writing *ca.* 195, notes that “The spiritual man[5] prays in thought during every hour, being allied to God by love” (*ANF* 2:503). Nonetheless, just as an artist must study the best models and techniques before creating something great, the creativity of human spirituality greatly benefits from the guidance provided by the experience of those who have reached spiritual heights. Vivid examples of the dangers of unguided creativity abound in our time, but can also be learnt from history.[6] Related to the topic of this study, such indispensable guidance can be seen both in the codification of the prayer rules that begin and end the day, and in the choice of prayers within the “main group” of these Rules.

Many scholars have suggested—and with strong scriptural evidence for these suggestions (found primarily in Acts)—that Jewish Christians continued to observe the Prayer Rules of their local communities for some time following Christ’s ascension. These rules varied to some degree, but may certainly be seen as a very likely foundation for the development of later Christian forms of Morning and Evening Prayer:

“We might expect that first Christians to have continued to observe whatever were customary Jewish times of daily prayer, but there seems to have been a variety of practice among Jews of the first century: some appear to have prayed twice a day, morning and evening, but others three times a day, either morning, noon, and evening, or morning, afternoon (3 p.m.), and evening.” (Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship* 70)

The specifics of Jewish forms of prayer, however, remain elusive to scholarship, as “no two authors seem to agree about even the basics of Jewish services and prayer at the time of Christ” (Taft 3).

Moreover, soon enough, Jewish Christians were forced out of the synagogues and perhaps communities by the emerging post-Temple rabbinical Judaism (Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* 24), while those entering the Church were increasingly of non-Jewish background. Thus, even though the *Didache*, a first-century document (Holmes 159), lists three times for prayer (8:3; *ANF* 7:379), there is evidence that these times followed the principal divisions of the day in the Roman Empire—the third, sixth, and ninth hours—rather than any specifically Jewish forms (although some, especially Hellenistic Jews, may have favored the Roman division of time in organizing their day, including their daily prayers). Moreover, a fivefold pattern of daily prayer emerged adding Morning and Evening Prayers to the Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours (Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship* 70), thus laying the foundation for the later development of the daily liturgical cycle.

Finally, attempts to establish a direct link between first-century Jewish worship and early Christian prayer may be not only difficult, but counterproductive. A parallel between Jewish times for prayer and Christian Morning and Evening Prayer most certainly exists, but morning and evening “are natural prayer hours in any tradition... At any rate the office that has come down to us is the product of gentile Christianity, and a direct Jewish parentage cannot be demonstrated” (Taft 11).

The passages related to Christian prayer that we find in Acts (1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12) seem to imply communal prayer by the early Christians, but the *Didache* 8:3 appears to refer specifically to private recitations of the Lord’s Prayer by individual Christians or, perhaps, families, “thrice in the day.” Indeed, according to *Didache* 14:1, congregational gatherings were to take place “every Lord’s day,” *i.e.*, once a week (*ANF* 7:381). To be sure, communal gatherings for prayer were probably more frequent in the few years immediately following the Resurrection and Ascension, but as eschatological expectations of the imminent return of Christ had to be balanced against social and family obligations by the majority of Christians, thrice-daily communal gatherings were hardly more of an option for the early Christians than they are for most modern laymen. Commenting on a similar phenomenon in first-century Judaism, Paul Bradshaw writes:

“Were the times of daily prayer observed corporately in the synagogues or privately by individuals wherever they happened to be? Dugmore argues that the former was the general rule: ‘Although it may be true that not every tiny village community was able to go *en bloc* daily to the synagogue, at least in the larger towns, where it would be easier to obtain the requisite minimum of ten males and where the homes of people were grouped more closely around the synagogue, daily attendance at the public worship of the community would be the practice of every devout Jew.’ The number of places, however, where it was possible to find the Rabbinic quorum of ten males with both the leisure and the piety to attend the synagogue for the daily times of prayer was probably more limited than this sentence would seem to suggest, and while it is no doubt true, as Dugmore goes on to say, that daily services would have been found in such places as Jerusalem, Caesarea, Antioch, and Rome, nevertheless it is almost certain that for the

great majority of Jews the times of prayer were of necessity private devotion.” (Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* 18-9)

If the first Christian communities were formed in the same cities that Bradshaw mentions, then very similar life circumstances may be envisioned as affecting the early Christians—namely, lack of leisure and the considerable time required for travelling by foot to gather anywhere, unless one’s place of employment or occupation was very close to the gathering place, which may have been the case for some, but perhaps not for most. And while the earliest evidence about Christian communities does not suggest a lack of piety as an obstacle to public worship, many other factors were beginning to play a role by the first decades of the second century. Thus, already at the end of the first decades of the second century—the likely date of the composition of the *Didache*—daily prayers were probably understood as private, rather than liturgical. Tertullian, writing near the end of the second century, appears to attest to this: “How [can we pray] ‘in every place,’ since we are prohibited from praying in public? He means in every place that opportunity or even necessity may have rendered suitable” (ANF 3:689).

The post-persecution development of the so-called “Cathedral Office” and clerical attempts to bring the faithful into churches for daily prayers will be discussed later in this paper. At this point, however, it is worth noting that the daily Rule according to the *Didache* is described (perhaps, not exclusively) as a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer thrice in the day. Bradshaw argues that “it is highly improbable that the Lord’s Prayer constituted the sum total of the Christian daily prayer in the New Testament period or indeed that the *Didache* intended it to be so, as some scholars have concluded, but much more likely that it was to be incorporated within the normal Jewish forms” (Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* 27). But it may be equally improbable that these “normal Jewish forms” consisted of too much more than the twice-daily *Shema*’ (unless one was a woman, child, or slave, who were excluded from this obligation—see Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* 1-2). There is some evidence to an additional threefold pattern of daily prayer in early Rabbinic Judaism, and perhaps in first-century Pharisaic circles, but it is unclear at best how these patterns affected Christian prayer, if at all.

As we move on to the second century, the following passage from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (ca. 155-167) is interesting considered in this context: “On the soldiers giving him permission, Polycarp [ca. 69-167?] stood and prayed, being full of the grace of God. In fact, he could not cease for two full hours, to the astonishment of those who heard him” (ANF 1:40). It is not at all important that Roman soldiers were astonished at two full hours of prayer, but that the account was written not for the soldiers, but for Christians, who, presumably, were to be inspired by this example. But two-, three-, or even four- and five-hour-long prayer services are not at all astonishing within Eastern Christianity any longer, and have not been for centuries. Even the private Morning or Evening Rule of modern devout Christians can take close to an hour or longer, so the two-hour-long prayer of the Bishop of Smyrna before his execution can hardly be called astonishing. The mention, however, most likely alludes to the relative brevity of early Christian prayer. As Tertullian wrote ca. 198, “we should not think that the Lord must be approached with a train of words” (ANF 3:681).

Searching for further evidence of the development of Morning and Evening prayer Rules, we can point to an exhortation by Saint Clement of Alexandria (c. 195): "... before partaking of sleep, it is a sacred duty to give thanks to God, having enjoyed His grace and love. As a result, we can go straight to sleep" (*ANF* 2:249). And again, "The whole life of the spiritual man is a holy festival. His sacrifices ... are psalms and hymns during meals and before bed—and prayers also again during the night" (*ANF* 2:537). Finally, the same Clement attests to the threefold pattern of prayer, albeit, as a lesser path compared with unceasing prayer: "some persons assign definite hours for prayer—as, for example, the third, sixth, and ninth—yet the spiritual man prays throughout his whole life, endeavoring by prayer to have fellowship with God" (*ANF* 2:534).

Another early Christian writer, Tertullian (*ca.* 160 – *ca.* 220), gives very similar accounts of the virtual lack of any legalistic understanding of the still developing norms of Christian prayer. Writing at the end of the second century, Tertullian attests to Christian Morning Prayer in the following passage: "But who would hesitate every day to prostrate himself before God, at least in the first prayer with which we enter on the daylight?" (*ANF* 3:689) Yet, he further notes:

"As for *times* of prayer, nothing at all has been prescribed except clearly "to pray at every time and every place." ... However, the outward observance of certain hours will not be unprofitable. I mean those common hours that mark the intervals of the day—the third, the sixth, and the ninth—which we may find in the Scriptures to have been more solemn than the rest." (*ibid.*)

Finally, tying contemporary practice with the Scripture, Tertullian notes that, "just as we read this to have been observed by Daniel, ... we also pray at a minimum of not less than three times during the day" (*ANF* 3:690). In other words, by the end of the second century, and perhaps much earlier, we can observe no overt reliance on the Jewish tradition of prayer, except for the general use of Hebrew Scripture, but rather a period of seeking and creating of Christian forms within the framework of natural and traditional divisions of time common to both Jews and Gentiles in the Roman Empire (morning-evening; third-sixth-ninth hours). Saint Cyprian of Carthage († 258) gives, perhaps, the most comprehensive description of some of the influences on the development of Christian Prayer Rules:

"The three children, with Daniel, ... observed the third, sixth, and ninth hours—as a type of sacrament of the Trinity. ... The worshipers of God in times past ... made use of these intervals of hours for determined and lawful times of prayer. ... But for us, beloved brethren, besides the hours of prayer observed of old, both the times and the sacraments have now increased in number. For we must also pray in the morning—that the Lord's resurrection may be celebrated by morning prayer. ... Also, at the setting of the sun and at the decline of the day, we must necessarily pray again." (*ANF* 5:456-7)

It is, of course, impossible to know, whether Saint Cyprian could have envisioned that this cycle of five or six times for prayer[7] would eventually develop into an eleven-fold (!) pattern: Morning and Evening Prayers, First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours, Midnight Office, Compline, Vespers, Matins, and the Liturgy; with many more services that can be added: the "Between-Hours" (or "Inter-Hours"; Greek *mesoria*), various canons and Rules before and after Communion, etc. The development of such a

“prolific” prayer life of the Church can best be understood in the context of the development of the so-called “cathedral office” in the decades and centuries that followed the legalization of Christianity—this will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

The text traditionally attributed to Saint Hippolytus of Rome^[8] and written around 215, *Traditiones Apostolicae*, attests to a methodical pastoral approach to early Christian prayer. The faithful are clearly instructed to pray at home in the morning and evening (35:1; 41:1, 10-12), and likewise at the third, sixth and ninth hours “at home, ... but if you are somewhere else at that moment, pray to God in your heart” (41:5; also 7 and 8; Cuming). The admonition to go to an assembly is reserved for the mornings “when in the word of God is given” (41:2), which apparently did not happen every day, as the faithful are urged to make a choice between going to church and going to work in favor of the former (41:1-2). Thus, even in Rome, the capital city of the Empire, Christians may not have assembled every day of the week, and on the days that assemblies did take place, it is likely that not all the faithful could be there (see esp. 41:2-3). As is typical in pastoral homiletics, admonitions to the faithful to attend church more often most probably point to a problem with church attendance, as may be evidenced through the study of the Cathedral Office.

Development of Daily Cycles of Services

In order to more fully understand the process of the codification of Morning and Evening Prayer Rules, it is necessary to examine the origins of the Cathedral Office and the forces that governed its development. In part, the structure of the Rules, as was discussed earlier in the paper, is indicative of their origins within the liturgical cycle of the Church. But perhaps even more interesting is the dating of the prayers in the “main groups,” at least according to their traditional attributions: Saint Macarius of Egypt—ca. 300-391, Saint Basil the Great—330-379, Saint John Chrysostom—347-407. In other words, most of the prayers in the “main groups” are attributed to the fourth century, which is also the time of the development of the cathedral office. Whether this coincidence is of any significance is, of course, unclear, but it provides a good starting point for further exploration. A detailed and excellent study of the Cathedral Office in the fourth-century East is contained in chapter three of part one of Robert Taft’s *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (31-56), and it is hardly necessary to reproduce it here, except for some important highlights.

In the estimation of some scholars,

“After the Peace of Constantine in the fourth century Christians began to celebrate publicly certain of the daily hours of prayer which they had previously observed either individually or with their families. The hours generally chosen were the morning and the evening, partly because these were the only ones for which it was practical for most people to gather together (the other times occurred during the working day, and it was not easy or always safe to venture out for prayer at night).” (Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship* 72)

The last comment deserves particular attention, as the situation with respect to work and ease of nightly travel hardly changed from the previous two centuries to the fourth

century. Indeed, the same factors affected the lives of the faithful for the next millennium and a half, until social revolutions in Europe made it possible for some people to work no more than eight or ten hours a day, thus providing more time for other activities, including twice-daily trips to the local church.

Of course, much attention must be paid to many other factors that make broad parallels drawn across the ages and cultures nearly impossible. A relatively small number of free people in the ancient world and the inability of slaves to govern their own time, the mostly agrarian nature of ancient societies and the rise of manufacturing in Europe from the seventeenth century onward, the possible difference in the levels of literacy between the early Christians and their European descendants in the Age of Enlightenment (most probably, in favor of the ancients)—all these and many other factors prevent us from making overly confident projections upon church attendance in the fourth century based on our current experience. Nonetheless, the main factors in deciding whether to go to church twice daily most likely were much the same for the ancient Christian as they are for the twenty-first-century faithful—the availability of time and the distance that must be travelled in order to get to the assembly.

An interesting remark found in *Testamentum Domini nostril Iesu Christi*, a document that was probably composed no later than the end of the third century,[\[9\]](#) allows us a rare glimpse into what may have always been close to the real state of public daily prayer. *Testamentum* instructs a bishop to remain in church in prayer eight or nine times each day (depending on the way the hours of prayer are counted); and to pray by himself, but if at least one or two people would join him in prayer, then it would be good to pray together (1:22). A modern parallel seems only natural: if a priest were to keep eight daily prayer times in most of our churches, he would probably find himself alone in the church quite often, considering it good if one or two people would join him from time to time.

This point allows us to envision the “ideal worshiper” who both has the time to go to church and lives in relative proximity to the house of worship. *Pax Eccesiae*[\[10\]](#) allowed not only for the building of Christian temples where worshipers could gather without fear of persecution, but also for an increasing number of Christian clergy to flourish in the discharge of their pastoral and liturgical duties. There are numerous historical and hagiographical accounts as well as canonical attestation of the piety and zeal of the bishops and presbyters of the Early Church. Additionally, in the fourth and fifth centuries increasing numbers of them were choosing a path of celibacy and complete devotion to the Church. Finally, a larger number of full-time clergy, not constrained by family or employment obligations, would have significantly more time to devote to common prayer than ever before. It is relatively easy to hypothesize, then, that groups of cathedral clergy would prefer to gather for common Morning and Evening Rules, as well as for Hours and other services. Of course, it is doubtful that many faithful could follow the lead of their clerics, which undoubtedly gave rise to a number of admonitions both in sermons (of Saint John Chrysostom, for example) and canons (*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*), which will be presented in due course.

In time, the practice of clerical common prayer would necessarily facilitate standardization of the Prayer Rules, although a few centuries and processes would pass before the Eastern Church arrived at the more or less common practice that it now

enjoys. The fourth and fifth centuries, however, were far from uniform. Socrates Scholasticus (ca. 380-?) in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* written around the middle of the fifth century laments that “it is impossible to find anywhere ... two churches which agree exactly in their ritual respecting prayer” (5:22; *NPNF* 2:132).

Notwithstanding this *libertas in dubiis*, preachers exhorted the faithful to attend church daily. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, which were most probably compiled at the end of the fourth century, instruct bishops to “command and exhort them [the people] to come constantly to church morning and evening every day” (2:7:59; *ANF* 7:422). Interestingly enough, it also urges them to use “the vain zeal of the heathens and Jews” as a “proper example and motive to excite Christians to frequent the church” (2:7:60; *ANF* 7:423), as well as states that the excuse of having to go to work is merely the pretence of “a despiser, ‘offering pretences for his sins’” (2:7:61; *ibid.*). Apparently, many faithful in the fourth century were found to be lacking the zeal of the Jews and the heathens, and abstaining from twice-daily services under the pretence of having to go to work. It seems little has changed since then. If your parishioners cannot come to church, the next best thing you can suggest to them as a pastor is to pray at home.

It would be incorrect to propose that the origin of the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules is in the fourth century, as we saw clear evidence for this type of prayer throughout the history of the Early Church. But it was in the fourth century that these various “proto-rules” entered into wide usage, both due to the increasing numbers of the faithful and to the rise of another institution that would benefit from normative private Prayer Rules—communal monasticism.

Saintly leaders of larger communities were usually carriers of an earlier desert tradition of solitary ceaseless prayer.^[11] But because the Prayer Rules devised by these leaders for monastic communities were greatly revered by their respective followers, and the orders put in place were carefully preserved, standardization occurred quite naturally. Additionally, “because nearly every important Christian bishop of the second half of the fourth century^[12] had lived as a monk at one time or another during his career, the form of spiritual life that they advocated to ordinary lay people was essentially monastic in character” (Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship* 74). Thus, the fusion of the developing Cathedral Office with monastic prayer for the use of the faithful may have had its origins at that time. This does not yet have any direct relationship to the forms found in the *Russian Prayer Book*, but may explain the principle of monastic or monastic-style prayer in the framework of the cathedral-style Prayer Rule.

This important influence of monasticism on the development of the Prayer Rules of the laity may, in fact, be the key to understanding the origins of the Morning and Evening Prayers:

“As we have seen, in the fourth century morning and evening were the two hours of obligatory public prayer in cathedral usage. And although there is less than complete precision in the still extant descriptions of the prayer-life of the ascetics of Lower Egypt, ... the embryonic cursus of Scetis ... had only two daily prayer times: on rising, and after the one daily meal at the ninth hour, just before retiring.

On Monday through Friday, the two daily offices were done by the monks in their cells, either alone or with whoever happened to reside with them or be visiting at the time. Only on Saturday and Sunday did all the monks of the laura gather in church..." (Taft 61)

Certainly, such a "withdrawal" from the community for most of the week would have been much more manageable for Christians living in the world, than the cenobitic recommendations noted above and also observed by various other monastic communities (Pachomian, for example), where "the two customary daily offices at dawn and in the evening before retiring were held in common" (Taft 63). Cathedral clergy, on the other hand, would have been much more able and willing to gather for common daily prayers than an average layman not employed at the cathedral.

Finally, in the third quarter of the fourth century, Saint Basil the Great established communities of ascetics in towns "to give seculars a living model of Christian life" (Taft 84).

"So these Basilian ascetics celebrated matins and vespers in imitation of the cathedral offices, adding to them terce, sext, none, and later compline, as well as something new, a *mesonyktik* or nightly vigil... Clearly, this cursus is mainly a "liturgicizing" of the ancient horarium of Christian daily prayer." (*ibid.*)

Not all scholars agree that edifying the seculars was the primary intent of Saint Basil in establishing his ascetic communities. Some have asserted that Saint Basil primarily intended to bring monasticism from the desert into the Church, and to give it (monasticism) a solid ecclesiastical foundation, which it heretofore lacked (Meyendorff). I agree with Meyendorff's conclusions, but, to be sure, any positive influence on the seculars would also be a perpetual concern of any bishop.

It is rather difficult to imagine that these exemplary ascetic communities would have had any more effect on the habits of the "seculars" than did the entreaties of the cathedral clergy to be in church twice daily. An ascetic can be no more an example to a married man than the latter can be to the former. That is to say, one can be a source of inspiration to another, but hardly a very useful example of how one should organize one's day. It is likely that those who had the time and lived in close proximity to a church attended public services more frequently than those who had social and family obligations and lived further away. Naturally, the next best thing to going to church for prayer was to pray wherever a person happened to be—at home or at work.

The main difficulty in adopting the Cathedral of Basilian Offices for home use is their overwhelming complexity that relies on the use of multiple books in order to follow the various cycles that are incorporated into services: the two Triodions, Pentecostarion, the yearly cycle, etc. Of course, not all of them were fully developed in the fourth and fifth centuries, but neither was the printing press. This balance of the availability of books and the literacy of the faithful deserves further exploration.

Estimating the literacy rate in the ancient world remains rather difficult due to the various definitions of literacy that have been used throughout history: from the ability to sign one's name to the ability to read Latin. Moreover, the question of ancient literacy seems to have gained an ideological dimension, since proposing that Jesus and almost all of the Jews were literate raises His (and their) perceived socio-economic status,

whereas claiming that Galilean villagers, and Jesus among them, were illiterate places Him closer to the poor and hungry of the modern world.

Literacy rates likely have never been at one hundred percent, not even in Cuba, Estonia, or Poland, where UNESCO lists a literacy rate of 99.8% (Watkins, Ugaz and Carvajal 229). Absent a concerted and well-funded government effort, literacy rates seem to bear some relation to religious life, at least in the faiths that place high value on Scripture—(post-Temple?) Judaism, Christianity (from the second century forward?), and Islam. An interesting parallel, albeit open for interpretation, may be observed in the plummeting of the rate of literacy in France from over sixty-five percent for the generation that stormed the Bastille, to just over five percent one hundred years later (Houdailles and Blum).

For our purposes, it may be safe to assume that cultures that have traditionally relied on some form of Scripture probably had a good incentive to learn to read and to teach their children based on the perceived value of being able to study the Scripture. Thus, rates of literacy in such cultures may have never been very low. An interesting remark in this context is found in the *Instructional Information* (Russian: “*Izvestiye uchitelnoye*”) contained in the Russian edition of the priest’s *Service Book* that reads as follows: “If one of the communicants does not know how to read, then the priest or deacon or one of the participants must teach him about this so that people may be converted to a greater desire for the love of the Lord” (SB 27).^[13] This, in turn, would allow for some limited use of books for private prayer. This “Instructional Information” first appeared in the 1699 edition of the *Service Book* and was a somewhat abbreviated version of the *Teaching* (Russian: *Voumleniye*) compiled in the mid-seventeenth century by the monk Evfimii (Euthimios) of the Archangel Michael Monastery in the Moscow Kremlin. Evfimii, in turn, relied on the *Book of Needs* of the Metropolitan of Kiev and Halych Peter Mogila, especially the *Treatise on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ*, itself an apparent redaction of the *De Defectibus* of the Council of Trent.^[14] This reliance on the Western tradition is notable and will be mentioned again later in the paper.

Of course, the wide availability of printed materials is associated with the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century in Western Europe.^[15] But this in no way implies that books were unavailable until then. Mass production of large numbers of copies was certainly difficult, but shorter manuscripts may have been in limited circulation by the end of the first millennium of Christianity and passed on within families for several generations. Moreover, notes, receipts, deeds, and other written material is generally present among artifacts from the first Christian millennium. Finally, while some have estimated the rate of literacy in the Roman Empire of the first three centuries of Christendom to be around three to five percent (Meyendorff), others point out that Christians comprised only eight to fifteen percent of the population at the time of the Edict of Milan (313), and the rate of literacy among Christians could differ significantly from that of the general population. Nonetheless, in the examined sources, we cannot find any mention of written Prayer Rules for the laity circulating within Christendom at any time before the second half of the second millennium.

Possible Ways to Understand the Development of the Prayer Rules

As mentioned earlier, the *Instructional Information* instructs that priests or deacons teach the faithful to read and informs them that this is for the purpose of performing the Rule before Holy Communion (SB 21). This seventeenth-century document has an entire section on “How it is necessary for the priestly officiant to prepare himself for a worthy celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the Communion of the Divine Mysteries of Christ” (SB 6-29). In the rather detailed list of that which a priest must do to prepare for Holy Communion, we find all public services (or the “Church Rule” [SB 26]), canons and akathists, the Prayers before Holy Communion, but not the Morning and Evening Prayers, except one mention of “The Prayer on Approaching Sleep,” which is found in the Compline (SB 19). The very same rule is also applied to laymen (SB 27). To be sure, on page 94 of the *Service Book*, we find the modern version of the Rule which includes the Morning and Evening Rules, but this is a later addition. Thus, it appears that even the clergy in Russia at the very end of the seventeenth century were not expected to perform the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules as we know them, even though such rules may have been included in the 1647 Russian edition of the *Prayer Book*—one of the first published in Russia (Bulgakov 6:339).

Western Influence

The dating of the first editions of the *Russian Prayer Book* seems to coincide with the Western influence that entered the Russian Church, including its rites and prayers, through the work of Peter Mogila (or Movilă), Metropolitan of Kiev (1596-1646). Mogila not only was intimately familiar with Western theology and praxis through his work in Poland and Western Ukraine, but also apparently used Latin sources in his redactions of the various rites and services of the Orthodox Church. Due to Mogila’s prolific printing activities, the influence of services in his redaction on the praxis of the Russian Church has been most notable. Undoubtedly, one of the Western books to which Mogila had access was the Breviary that by the seventeenth century had entered into wide use in the Roman Catholic Church.

In some sense, the Breviary really is the first *Prayer Book*. The process of the monasticization of Western clergy, which made all clergy subject to monastic vows and rules and at the same time under pastoral, missionary, academic, and other obligations, is well described in Taft’s *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (299-306). Already in the *Rule of Chrodegang* (*Regula Canoniorum*; eighth century) chapter 4 we can find an instruction to say the Hours in private, if one cannot be in church (S. Chrodegangi 6). By the tenth century, this instruction

“becomes common legislation for the clergy in Western canonical sources. It is not by accident that our first portable breviaries, a single collection in one volume of all the necessary elements for the recitation of the offices previously distributed throughout several anthologies (psalter, antiphonary, responsorial, homiliary, evangeliary) appear in monastic circle in the eleventh century.”^[16] (Taft 299-300)

The first formal justification of private recitation followed suit in the *Decretals* of Cardinal Henry of Segusio (ca. 1200-1271) (see *ibid.*),^[17] although even the Council of

Trent (1545-1563) did not make any formal mention of any private office three hundred years later.

Despite the ominous timing of the spread of a normative private office among the Western clergy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the first editions of the *Russian Prayer Book*, the Roman *Breviary* does not contain the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules and cannot help in identifying their sources. The *Breviary* certainly provides the normative framework for private prayer, no longer demanding that the faithful (or clergy, in the case of the *Breviary*) gather for public prayer several times daily. But the source of the Russian synthesis of the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules is not to be found with the friars. In fact, the Russian Rules appear to have been in some flux at least throughout the twentieth century. Some inconsistencies and additions that happened in the second half of the century were noted earlier in this paper. And a turn-of-the-century edition of the *Russian Prayer Book* (1906) provides even more evidence for this “work in progress” with respect to the Prayer Rules. The Morning Rule, for example, lacks prayers six, seven, and eight, while the Evening Rule is missing prayers three, four, six, eight, nine, and the prayer of Peter the Studite, which apparently was added into Russian Prayer Books only recently, as was discussed earlier.

According to Ilya Shugayev,[\[18\]](#) before the sixteenth century, private prayer consisted of the daily services found in the *Horologion*—a practice which is still in existence among some faithful who use the Midnight Office for their Morning Rule and the Compline in the evening. The first compilations of specifically Morning and Evening Prayers appeared in the seventeenth century: first in Ukrainian editions of the Psalter, and later in its Moscow editions (Question 210). This timeline largely follows in the wake of the development in the West: the first *Book of Common Prayer* was compiled in England in 1549 and the *Book of Common Order* in Scotland in 1564, both containing sections with private prayers for home use. Both of these books, however, undoubtedly came out of the wave of Protestant liturgical creativity in the first half of the sixteenth century, which saw numerous editions of various services revised or created by the multitude of the Reformers in accordance with their developing theologies and theologumena. Most of these new creations, however, were concerned with the public worship of the newly established sects.

Thus, it seems plausible that the rise of individualized approaches to prayer within Western Christianity would have complemented the millennia-long tradition of private prayer in the East and provided an opportunity for “distilling” the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules by placing them outside of the overtly liturgical context and creating compilations of prayers for home use. However, I have not been able to gather any reliable information which would allow me to make any definite conclusions about the exact origins of the Russian form of the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules.

Alternate Prayers Rules

One conclusion can be made with a greater degree of certitude: the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules in their modern form have never been officially obligatory in the Russian Church. The reason for this is probably very simple: the Church has never had a way to ensure overwhelming literacy among its members. Even the reading of the

Scripture is obligatory only for clergy (beginning with the first rank), but not for the laity. Certainly, such attributes of private piety and devotion as the reading of the Scripture, various prayers, canons, and akathists have always been encouraged for those who are able, but it can hardly be required for all even in the twenty-first century. Additionally, the Morning and Evening Rules themselves appear to be a work in progress, and their relative stability may be due in part to the reign of Communism in Russia for much of the twentieth century—a condition that made most works-in-progress within the Church stop in their tracks.

This does not mean, however, that in the absence of a normative Prayer Rule the faithful had no prayer life at all. On the contrary, many alternate Rules existed and continue to exist. Most of these Rules may be monastic in origin, but it is not at all improbable that parish clergy moved by pastoral concerns would give recommendations to their flock. Saint Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833), for example, urged people who could not read to practice a very short Prayer Rule: the Lord's Prayer three times, the Angelic Salutation three times, and the Creed once—all of which are easily memorized (Men 58). In addition to these, the Hesychastic Jesus Prayer should be recited as often as possible, without the rest of the elements of the Hesychastic practice.

But even the relative rigidity of the modern Prayer Rules gives way to pastoral concerns for the needs of the faithful. Father Alexander Men (1935-1990) mentions a “shorter Rule meant for everyone,” which consists of the standard beginning and end of the Morning and Evening Rules, but with only three selected prayers from each “main group” respectively: one to God, one to the Theotokos, and one to the Guardian Angel (57). The complete Rule, according to Men, is for “people who have more time than other people” (*ibid.*). This reasoning, apparently, is not unique to Fr. Men, as numerous editions of Short Prayer Books abound, including a 1955 Moscow printing and a 1942 Sofia printing specifically for Russian refugees.

In these *Short Prayer Books*, we find not only abbreviated Morning and Evening Prayers, but also a shortened Rule before Holy Communion—a feature which makes us suppose that the real reason for shortening the Rules may be the spiritual infancy of those for whose sake such abbreviations are done—not the consideration of time or the pace of life. Indeed, very similar abbreviations can be found in the various editions of the *Prayer Book* for children. It is not the case that children are not expected to grow in wisdom, understanding, and intensity of religious life (not to be confused with spirituality), but they are quite obviously not expected to chant all of the prayers found in the standard editions of the Prayer Book.

The last point brings us to the final observation: the 1900 edition of the *Priest's Prayer Book* contains all of the prayers found in the most complete recent editions of the Prayer Book for laity, including the prayers that were missing in earlier editions.^[19] In other words, the complete Rules found in the modern editions already existed over a century ago (including in a 1912 Kiev edition of the *Rule before Holy Communion*), but were understood to be Rules for the clergy, and shortened to one degree or another for use by laity. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, these Rules for laity were gradually brought into conformity with their apparent source—the Rules in the *Priest's Prayer Book*. Thus, shortening of the Prayer Rule for pastoral reasons is not only acceptable, but has been the norm throughout the twentieth century. In this context,

the complete Rules that have been recently published and are viewed by many as a standard can be understood as realistic goals to which a pious person should steer his or her spiritual life, rather than an absolute obligation for all.

Finally, it appears that the only attempt to point to the actual source of our contemporary Morning and Evening Prayer Rules comes from the Dean of the Saint-Philaret Theological Institute Fr. George Kochetkov (1950-), who asserts that the Rules as we know them were compiled under the influence of Athonite monastic Rules in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This may be a reasonable hypothesis, but Kochetkov does not cite any sources for this information. The eighteenth century indeed was the time of the discovery of the Athonite tradition in Russia, beginning with the publication of the *Philokalia* in Greek in 1782, its translations into Russian published in 1793 and 1822, and scholarly interest in Athonite traditions and bibliographic treasures. It is plausible that what we now know as our Morning and Evening Prayers (that is, the “main groups”), were preserved in monastery libraries on Mount Athos, discovered by Russian pilgrims (many of whom were prominent Church hierarchs) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and deemed worthy of wider distribution among the faithful, beginning with their inclusion into the *Priest’s Prayer Book*. These, however, are mere speculations, and I have not been able to gather any evidence to support Kochetkov’s assertion.

Thus, it seems that even though we have been unable to uncover the roots of the Morning and Evening Prayer Rules in the Russian tradition, we have nonetheless been able to create a tentative timeline of the Rules’ usage and development. Moreover, we were able to discuss the history of Christian daily prayer and the interrelation between private and public prayer in the Early Church. Finally, despite the apparent rigidity of the modern Prayer Rules, we observed some varieties in its application in pastoral practice, which mainly consists of the shortening of the Rules due to various pastoral considerations.

Conclusion

Spiritual life, like any good thing, takes time and effort. From the earliest records available to us, we know that Christians sanctified their lives through daily prayer, which was seen as fundamental to spiritual life. While the specific times and prayers varied throughout Christendom both geographically and temporally, the faithful were generally urged to pray three to five times each day, either in private or together with the community. Thus, it can be said that there has been a rule of praying at least in the morning, around midday, and in the evening for the entire history of Christianity.

The textual content of these prayer times developed over time, often within the vein of the liturgical development of the Church. It was probably understood from at least Late Antiquity and through the Middle Ages that some public services of the Church, such as the Midnight Office, Compline and Hours, could be used for private or home prayer. And it is likely that some, especially literate Christians in fact had private Prayer Rules consisting of the said services. Some appear to be of the opinion that such was the primary composition of private Prayer Rules in Russia until, perhaps, the nineteenth century. It is quite difficult, however, to assess how wide-spread this practice really was.

The modern Morning and Evening Prayer Rules that have become standard in the Russian Church are of uncertain origin and have gained their popularity only within the last one or two hundred years. It seems that they have been able to address a real need in the Church, and have become a staple of Russian Orthodox spirituality. These Rules have never been officially mandated as obligatory, although the need to pray at least three times daily has. The Rules consist of prayers whose attributions cannot be verified as authentic. But the purity of thought, height of spirit, and depth of theology contained in the prayers make their saintly origins most likely, if not certain. Thus, of whatever origin, the morning and evening prayers contained in the Rules make them most beneficial and suitable for fostering healthy individual spirituality within the Russian Orthodox tradition.

Finally, while the modern Rules do not carry the authority of either canon or tradition, they nonetheless may be seen as an excellent guide for most faithful on their spiritual path, albeit not the only one. Pastors may find the Rules to be one of the most useful tools for the majority of the faithful, yet pastoral prudence must be exercised at all times in keeping with the words of Christ: “He who is able to accept it, let him accept it” (Matt. 19:12). This is in no way a call to brevity of prayer, although most *Prayer Books* published in the twentieth century appear to have been abbreviated to one degree or another, but a call to prudence.

The Rules as we know them in the Russian Church today appear to be a worthy pastoral experiment, whose results are yet to be evaluated. So, above all, more work needs to be done with respect to the actual experience of the Church over the last century, as it measures up against the previous experience of using mostly liturgical forms of prayer even in private, at least insofar as we are able to assess it. This experience is in no way limited to the Russian Church; the Greek Church, for example, also developed a set of morning and evening prayers, albeit, very different from those used by the Slavs.

In the absence of daily services in most parish churches and the near absence of the faithful at daily services in churches where they are held, private Prayer Rules become ever more important for an individual spiritual life. The current Rules, including Morning and Evening Prayers, Prayers throughout the Day, Prayers before and after Meals, and many others contained in the Russian *Prayer Book*, provide a solid spiritual and theological foundation, as well as a living link between the Fathers of the Church and the moderns. Real pastoral work, however, always remains to be done both in helping adapt Prayer Rules to the individual spiritual growth of the faithful, and in helping the faithful rise to the mark set by the Prayer Rules.

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Notes

[1] Here *et passim* I shall not transcribe into my paper those common prayers that can be easily accessed through a wide variety of means: printed, electronic, and audio versions of the Russian Orthodox Prayer Book, both in Russian and English. Copying entire sections from the Prayer Book into the paper would not only detract from the main purpose of this study, but also make it unnecessarily cumbersome. It will be assumed that the reader is either familiar with many of them, or can readily find the prayers that I mention in my study.

[2] Plural for *troparion*—a short hymn of one stanza in Byzantine liturgical music.

[3] A form of Byzantine liturgical poetry.

[4] The Russian Orthodox Church uses the so-called Jerusalem Typikon, or the order of services compiled at the monastery of Saint Sabas the Sanctified.

[5] Here *et passim*, Saint Clement uses the word “gnostic” or “the knowing man,” which the translators chose to render as “the spiritual man.”

[6] See, for example, the account of Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea Palaestina, in his *Historia Ecclesiae* VII:30:9, 10.

[7] Depending on how one is to interpret: “at the setting of the sun and at the decline of the day.”

[8] The attribution of this text to Saint Hippolytus may be a mistake.

[9] In a debate with Ignace Ephrem Rahmani (1848-1929) at the turn of the twentieth century, Franz Xavier von Funk (1840-1907) argued for a fifth century date for *Testamentum*. Many of his arguments, however, seem less than convincing.

[10] *Pax Ecclesiae*, or “Peace of the Church” is the more common term for what Bradshaw referred to as the “Peace of Constantine.”

[11] Saint Macarius of Egypt whose prayer we find in the morning and evening rules, for example, presided over the monastic community in Wadi El Natrun (Scetis), but before then he was a disciple of Saint Anthony the Great.

[12] For example, Saints Basil the Great and John Chrysostom, whose prayers are found in the morning and evening rules.

[13] The *Instructional Information* is placed at the end of the *Service Book*, but has its own page numbers, beginning with 1.

[14] This information was contained in the report “On the Eucharistic bread and wine” prepared by Professor I. A. Karabinov for the 1917-1918 Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church.

[15] Movable type was invented in China in the eleventh century and perfected in Korea in the thirteenth century.

[16] One can only wonder whether the Orthodox *Horologion* had similar origins.

[17] Note that Taft refers to Henry as “Hostiensis.”

[18] Fr. Ilya Shugayev received his Doctorate in Theology from Moscow Theological Academy in 1999.

[19] A 1901 edition, however, is “missing” one of the evening prayers.